

## **Perceptions and Barriers to Addressing Domestic Violence: The Case of Kosovo**

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### **Abstract**

Domestic violence is a significant cause of human suffering and a violation of fundamental human rights. It represents one of the most prevalent forms of violence globally. The Penal Code of the Republic of Kosovo classifies domestic violence as a distinct criminal offense. This classification encompasses physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence within familial relationships. This study aims to explore individuals' perceptions and knowledge of domestic violence. It also seeks to identify the causes, effects, and barriers faced by victims in reporting such incidents in Kosovo. A structured survey was conducted with 900 randomly selected participants from various regions of Kosovo. This survey was complemented by secondary data analysis. The secondary data included legislation on domestic violence protection, reports from international organizations, and academic literature. The mixed-methods approach facilitated a comprehensive assessment of the occurrence of domestic violence. The sample consisted of 900 individuals, ensuring diverse representation from urban and rural areas. Findings indicate that genetic predisposition is perceived as the primary cause of domestic violence, with 53% of respondents agreeing. Common effects experienced by victims include physical injury and depression, both reported by 34% of participants.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, victims, perceptions, barriers, Kosovo.

### **Introduction**

Domestic violence is defined as any act or omission by one individual towards another that results in the violation of the physical, moral, psychological, sexual, social, or economic integrity of the latter (OSCE, 2013). Abuse can occur at any point during a relationship. This includes the period when the relationship is ending or even after it has concluded. This violence transcends cultural, ethnic, educational, or economic contexts.

Although this occurrence is influenced and caused by various circumstances and factors, domestic violence must be addressed and illuminated by specific segments of society. This is necessary to prevent and combat this issue (Latifi, Elezi, & Hysi, 2012). Domestic violence represents a serious and increasingly concerning issue within Kosovar society. It reflects pronounced economic, social, and cultural influences (Latifi, Elezi, & Hysi, 2012).

In the vast majority of cases, this type of violence encompasses physical, economic, sexual, and emotional abuse. It results in severe consequences for society

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at large. In Kosovo, domestic violence is a significant occurrence that necessitates a tailored approach to resolution. It also requires the provision of support for victims (Berhanie, 2019). Various national and international reports indicate the prevalence of domestic violence. They also highlight the acceptance of its use as a disciplinary and educational tool. This is often justified by deference to "authority" (Sarkar, 2021).

### **Literature Review**

In Kosovo, domestic violence has garnered increased attention following the end of the war in 1999 (Wareham, 2000). With the adoption of new legislation, Kosovo has made significant strides in protecting victims and punishing perpetrators of domestic violence. This is notably evident through the enactment of the Law on the Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence. This law addresses violence against women and gender-based violence (Assembly of Kosovo, 2016).

The law defines domestic violence as encompassing not only physical violence but also sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse. Domestic violence is defined in various ways by international organizations and the legislation of different countries (Zeppegno et al., 2019). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), domestic violence includes any act of physical, sexual, or emotional violence perpetrated within the family or among its members (WHO, 2024).

In a legal context, many countries define domestic violence to include not only physical violence but also economic control, social isolation, and psychological abuse (Hansen et al., 2018).

In recent decades, Kosovo has made numerous efforts to promote gender equality, human rights, and the rule of law. International organizations and the government of Kosovo have initiated programs aimed at empowering women, reducing the influence of customary justice, and strengthening the legal system. Despite these advancements, the causes of domestic violence in Kosovar families remain evident (Gage, 2005).

Key factors contributing to the occurrence of domestic violence in Kosovo include poverty and unemployment. When economic resources are limited, there is a tendency for tension and violence to arise due to personal frustrations (Brown et al. 2006). Unemployment in Kosovo is still pronounced, especially in rural areas. In these areas, women have fewer opportunities to enter the labor market and develop new professional skills.

According to the World Bank Report (2024), Kosovo has the highest unemployment rate in the region. Only 37% of those able to work are currently employed (World Bank Group, 2024). Such unemployment exacerbates gender inequality among spouses, thereby contributing to violence. Male unemployment also correlates with an increase in domestic violence. Numerous studies have shown that men who are unemployed or experiencing economic stress are more prone to

exhibit abusive behaviors towards their wives and children (Amnesty International, 2023).

Therefore, programs aimed at reducing male unemployment and enhancing economic stability within families can positively impact the reduction of domestic violence. Overall, the challenging economic conditions may heighten sensitivity to family conflicts. This creates a conducive environment for abuse and violence against women (Jordan et al., 2019). Thus, the causes of domestic violence are multifaceted. They include social, educational, cultural, and economic factors. These are among the primary contributors to the prevalence of domestic violence (Grant, 2007).

Despite these challenges, Kosovo, as a society with traditional roots, has undergone significant social and political changes over the past decades. This is particularly true following its declaration of independence in 2008. However, conventional and customary norms continue to exert a substantial influence on the daily lives of its citizens (Podvorica, 2011). These norms encompass outdated codes of behavior and morality that have shaped social, familial, and gender relations. They directly affect how individuals interact with one another and with institutions.

Consequently, Kosovar society is still imbued with traditional and customary norms that, to some extent, justify violence against women (Charmaz, 2006). Such cultural and social norms often view violence as an acceptable means of conflict resolution. This poses a barrier to the advancement of women's rights and the protection of victims (Abraham, 2002).

Although Kosovo now has a comprehensive modern legal system that adheres to the principles of the rule of law, customary justice practices still influence conflict resolution, especially in rural areas (Young, 2000). The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, which historically served as a guide for resolving disputes and punishing inappropriate behaviors, remains present in some communities. Its application has significantly declined in recent decades (Malcolm, 1998).

Traditional customary laws like the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini contain rules governing family and social life. These laws have persisted for many years in rural Kosovo (Dukagjini, 1989). The Kanun emphasizes the importance of honor, male authority, and family protection (Bostock et al., 2009). This traditional code restricts women's independence, excluding them from many decision-making processes and obligating them to respect male authority (Malcolm, 1998).

Thus, according to patriarchal gender norms, women are expected to stay at home. They are also expected to refrain from entering the workforce and remain submissive (Gopalan, 2022). "Wife beating"—perhaps the most common manifestation of male violence—further exacerbated by its hidden nature within the sacred walls of the family, emerges almost in every chapter. This includes discussions on the relationships between violence, women's health, and sexuality (Davies, 1994).

## **Aim**

This research paper aims to examine individuals' perceptions and knowledge of domestic violence, as well as to identify the causes, effects, and barriers faced by victims in reporting this occurrence in Kosovo.

### Objectives

The objectives of the study are.

- To examine individuals' perceptions and knowledge of domestic violence, including its causes and effects on the physical and mental health of victims.
- To identify the barriers that victims encounter in reporting violence and analyze the impact of socio-economic factors on this occurrence in Kosovo.

### Method

This study, conducted from October 2023 to April 2024, employed a structured survey of 900 randomly selected individuals from all regions of Kosovo. Additionally, we analyzed secondary sources, including legislation on domestic violence protection, reports from international organizations, and academic literature. This combined approach provided a comprehensive assessment of the phenomenon of domestic violence.

### Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 900 randomly selected individuals from across the territory of Kosovo, including both urban and rural areas, to ensure a diverse representation of the population.

### Instrument

The instrument used for data collection in this study was a structured survey that included multiple-choice questions. This survey identified the demographic characteristics of the participants and explored their knowledge and perceptions regarding domestic violence, facilitating statistical analysis.

### Results

#### Demographic overview

The research findings indicate diverse age representation, with individuals aged 36-45 constituting 31% of participants, suggesting heightened sensitivity to domestic violence issues, possibly due to personal experiences. In terms of gender, females make up 54% of the total, compared to 45% of males, reflecting a greater interest among women in discussing domestic violence, given their roles as common victims. Regarding residence, 59% of individuals are from urban areas, where there may be better access to reporting and support services, in contrast to 41% from rural areas, where social stigma is more pronounced. Educationally, 42% of participants have higher education, while 39% have completed secondary education, indicating a possible link between education level and awareness of domestic violence. Economically, 89% of individuals are in average financial circumstances, with only 11% classified as wealthy, suggesting that those in poorer conditions may face greater barriers to reporting incidents of violence.

Table 1. Demographic data

Item	N	%
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<b>Age</b>		
18 -25	189	21
26-35	216	24
36-45	279	31
+45	216	24
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	486	54
Male	405	45
<b>Residence</b>		
Urban zone	531	59
Rural zone	369	41
<b>Education</b>		
Primary School	90	10
Higher School	351	39
Graduate studies	378	42
Postgraduate studies	81	9
<b>Economic status</b>		
Wealthy	99	11
Average	801	89
Poor	0	0

### The causes, effects, and factors of domestic violence

Genetic predisposition is identified as the primary cause of domestic violence, with 53% of respondents citing this factor. Neurochemical anomalies (16%) and personality traits (26%) also contribute, highlighting the importance of psychological factors. Deficits in information processing (5%) suggest that cognitive issues may help explain violent behaviors. The effects of violence are severe, with injuries and depression affecting 34% of victims, while sleep disorders (13%) and substance abuse (14%) represent other significant aspects of mental health. Complications during pregnancy (1%) illustrate specific consequences for pregnant women. Education (45%) emerges as a key factor influencing the use of violence, indicating that individuals with lower educational attainment are more prone to violent behaviors due to a lack of conflict management skills. The influence of society (30%) indicates that cultural norms and social pressures are also significant, while economic factors (10%) and substance abuse (15%) exacerbate the situation.

Table 2. The causes, effects, and factors of domestic violence

Item	N	%
<b>Main Causes of Domestic Violence</b>		
Genetic predisposition	477	53
Neurochemical anomalies	144	16
Personality traits	234	26
Deficits in information processing	45	5
<b>What are the common effects on victims of domestic violence?</b>		
Injury	306	34
Eating disorders	36	4
Sleep disorders	117	13
Complications during pregnancy	9	1
Substance abuse	126	14
Depression	306	34
<b>What factors most influence the use of domestic violence in your community</b>		
Influence of education	405	45
Influence of economic conditions	90	10

Influence of society	270	30
Influence of substance abuse	135	15

### Knowledge and perceptions of domestic violence

A significant percentage of respondents (88%) express awareness of the 192 hotline and the services it offers, indicating a considerable level of awareness regarding support for victims of domestic violence. However, 5% of individuals lack knowledge about this service, while 7% express uncertainty about its function, highlighting the ongoing need for increased information within the community. Regarding the perception of institutional roles in combating violence, responses are divided; only 2% believe that institutions effectively address violence, while 29% express skepticism about their efforts. This indicates a general sense of dissatisfaction with institutional effectiveness. Concerning the identity of perpetrators, 78% of respondents believe that they are not always male, reflecting a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding this issue. However, 11% maintain that perpetrators are always male, suggesting that myths and misconceptions still exist and require attention.

Table 3. Knowledge and perceptions of domestic violence

Item	N	%
<b>Do you know about the 192 hotline, and what services does this hotline provide</b>		
Yes	792	88
No	45	5
Not sure	63	7
<b>How effectively do our institutions combat domestic violence and support victims?</b>		
Very much	18	2
Moderately	306	34
A little	315	35
Not at all	261	29
<b>Is the perpetrator of domestic violence always male?</b>		
Yes	99	11
No	702	78
I don't know	99	11

### Knowledge and perceptions of domestic violence

A substantial 68% of respondents reject the idea that domestic violence only occurs in economically disadvantaged families, reflecting a broad understanding of this complex social issue. However, 18% still believe violence is confined to such contexts, highlighting the need for continued education and awareness. Regarding childhood experiences, 54% think individuals raised in violent households are not destined to repeat violent behaviors, while 31% believe they are, indicating mixed perceptions about the impact of childhood trauma. A significant majority (75%) associate child physical abuse with domestic violence, showing awareness of its long-term consequences. Additionally, 52% recognize that female victims face barriers in reporting violence, emphasizing the need for a supportive culture that encourages disclosure. Moreover, 83% identify substance abuse as a contributing factor to domestic violence, reinforcing its importance in anti-violence strategies.

Notably, 82% of respondents acknowledge long-term effects for both victims and witnesses of violence, yet 49% still view discussing violence as shameful, reflecting persistent social stigma. Finally, while only 7% consider physical assault the sole type of violence, 70% recognize that violence can manifest in emotional and psychological forms, underscoring the need for holistic intervention strategies.

Table 4. Knowledge and perceptions of domestic violence

Variable	N	%
<b>Does domestic violence only occur in economically disadvantaged families?</b>		
Yes	162	18
No	612	68
I don't know	126	14
<b>If someone grows up in a violent household, are they destined to repeat the same behavior in their relationships?</b>		
Yes	279	31
No	486	54
I don't know	135	15
<b>Is there a tendency for child abuse to occur in the same families where domestic violence takes place?</b>		
Yes	675	75
No	99	11
I don't know	126	14
<b>Do women who are victims of domestic violence face barriers to reporting it?</b>		
Yes	468	52
No	180	20
I don't know	252	28
<b>Do you think the use of drugs or alcohol can be one of the factors contributing to domestic violence?</b>		
Yes	747	83
No	117	13
I don't know	36	4
<b>Are there long-term effects of being a victim or witness of domestic violence?</b>		
Yes	738	82
No	9	1
I don't know	153	17
<b>Is it shameful for a victim in your community to disclose that they are experiencing domestic violence?</b>		
Yes	441	49
No	351	39
I don't know	108	12
<b>Is physical assault the only form of domestic violence?</b>		
Yes	63	7
No	630	70
I don't know	207	23

## Discussion

The study's findings provide a comprehensive examination of demographic groups about domestic violence. Notably, individuals aged 36-45 represent 31% of respondents, indicating that this age group may possess significant experiences and insights about domestic violence, likely stemming from personal experiences or accumulated knowledge. Gender representation reveals that women constitute 54% of participants, highlighting a greater interest among females in discussing domestic violence, a trend consistent with their status as primary victims. This gender

disparity emphasizes the need for targeted strategies to engage men in discussions and initiatives surrounding domestic violence, fostering a more inclusive approach. Geographically, 59% of respondents reside in urban areas, where access to reporting mechanisms and support services is likely more prevalent. Conversely, 41% come from rural settings, where social stigma and isolation can create significant barriers to seeking help. This urban-rural divide underscores the necessity for tailored interventions to address the unique challenges faced by rural victims. Educationally, 42% of participants have higher education, suggesting that more educated individuals may be more attuned to social issues like domestic violence, reinforcing the idea that education plays a crucial role in prevention and awareness. Economically, 89% of respondents fall within a middle-income bracket, with only 11% identifying as wealthy. The underrepresentation of impoverished individuals suggests they may encounter greater obstacles in reporting violence due to fears of economic repercussions. The study identifies genetic predisposition as the primary perceived cause of domestic violence (53%), suggesting the need to consider biological and psychological factors in future research. Other contributing factors include neurochemical anomalies (16%) and personality traits (26%). The alarming effects of domestic violence are evident, with 34% of victims reporting injuries and depression, highlighting the need for robust support services. Awareness of helpline 192 is high at 88%, but there remains a need for increased awareness. While 11% mistakenly believe perpetrators are always male, 78% recognize the complexity of domestic violence, emphasizing the need to address persistent myths. Overall, the study indicates that a multifaceted approach is essential for effective intervention, combining education, awareness, and support for victims while considering the social, economic, and psychological factors involved.

### **Conclusion**

The results indicate that individuals aged 36-45 are particularly sensitive to issues of domestic violence, likely due to their life experiences. The higher participation of women in the study reflects their greater engagement in discussions about domestic violence, underscoring their role as primary victims of this phenomenon. The contrast between urban and rural areas highlights how social stigma and a lack of resources in rural settings can hinder reporting and seeking help. Genetic predisposition and psychological factors emerge as key contributors to domestic violence, suggesting a need for further research into these areas. There is a prevailing sense of skepticism regarding the effectiveness of institutions in combating domestic violence, indicating a need for improvement in institutional approaches and responses.

### **Recommendations**

To address these issues, it is essential to promote educational programs that enhance knowledge about domestic violence and its consequences, as well as conflict management techniques to prevent violent behavior. Establishing specialized services for psychological and social support for victims, with a particular focus on women and children, is also crucial. Enhancing the capacities of



institutions and staff engaged in handling domestic violence cases will ensure a more effective and appropriate response for victims. Improving access to information about available services and helplines, especially in rural areas, will help address the barriers that hinder the reporting of violence. Furthermore, it is vital to develop awareness campaigns that challenge myths surrounding domestic violence and promote a culture of support for victims. These campaigns should encourage individuals to seek help and openly discuss their experiences, making it easier for them to engage in the healing and rebuilding process after experiencing violence. These steps are necessary to create a safer and more supportive environment for all those affected by domestic violence.

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